Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 01739 01 OF 02 301439Z

46
ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 RSC-01 L-02 H-01 CIAE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 PRS-01 PA-01 /049 W
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AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
AMCONSUL UDORN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 1739

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGSJO PINT, TH
SUBJECT: A CENTRIST COALITION SCENARIO

REF: BANGKOK 1601

BEGIN SUMMARY: ON THE BASIS OF PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTHS, THE REFTELSUGGESTS SEVERAL POSSIBLE COALITIONS. IN THIS MESSAGE WE WISH TO COMMENT IN MORE DETAIL ON ONE OF THE MORE PROBABLE COALITIONS, WHICH WOULD HAVE AS ITS CORE THE DEMOCRATS AND THAI NATION, AND POSSIBLY INCLUDE SOCIAL AGRARIAN, SOCIAL ACTION, AND THE NEW FORCE. THERE SEEMS TO BE CONSIDERABLE LOGIC TO THIS COALITION, OR EVEN A MINORITY GOVERNMENT THAT WOULD LEAVE OUT SOME OR ALL OF THE LAST THREE.

END SUMMARY.

1. THAI NATION IS THE PIVOTAL PARTY AND COULD THROW ITS 28 SEATS IN EITHER DIRECTION: TOWARD THE CONSERVATIVES OR TOWARD THE CENTRISTS. THAI NATION, COMBINED WITH THE DEMOCRATS, WOULD TOTAL 100 SEATS. IF SOCIAL AGRARIAN JOINED IN, THE TOTAL WOULD BE 119. ADDING SOCIAL ACTION WOULD MAKE
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 01739 01 OF 02 301439Z

IT 137. THE FINAL ADDITION OF THE NEW FORCE WOULD MAKE

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

FOR 149. THERE ARE THREE SMALL PARTIES WITH CENTRIST TENDENCIES. THAI 4, SOVEREIGNTY 2, AND DEOMCRACY2. ALL OR SOME OF THESE EIGHT SEATS COULD ALSO GO INTO THE MIX.

2. ONE POSSIBLE SCENARIO IN BRINGING THE BASIC DEMOCRAT/THAI NATION COALITION TOGETHER COULD WORK OUT WITH SOME COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING: (1) SENI PRAMOT (DEMOCRAT) BECOMES PRIME MINISTER, 2) CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN (THAI NATION) BECOMES DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, OR DEFENSE MINISTER, 3) PRAMAN ADIREKSAN (THAI NATION) BECOMES SPEAKER OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, 4) SAWET PIANPONGSAN (SOCIAL AGRARIAN) BECOMES MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, 5) BUNCHU ROTCHANASATHIAN (SAP) BECOMES MINISTER OF FINANCE, AND 6) SOMSAK CHUTO (NEW FORCE) BECOMES FOREIGN MINISTER. IN A VARIATION OF THIS SCENARIO, THE NEW FORCE WOULD NOT JOIN THE COALITION, BUT WOULD COOPERATE WITH IT IN PARLIAMENT. THE DEMOCRAT-THAI NATION CORE COULD THUS FORM A MAJORITY GOVERNMENT WITH OTHER INGREDIENTS, OR A MINORITY GOVERNMENT WITHOUT SOME OF THEM.

3. ASSUMING A BASIC DEMOCRAT-THAI NATION COALITION THAT INCLUDES OTHER PARTIES, THERE ARE SEVERAL ADVANTAGES OR DISADVANTAGES THAT ACCRUE NOT ONLY TO THE CORE PARTIES, BUT ALSO TO SOCIAL AGRARIAN, SOCIAL ACTION AND THE NEW FORCE, AS WELL AS WHATEVER FORMER UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP) PARTIES REMAIN IN AN OPPOSITION ROLE. THEY ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. THE DEMOCRATS:

ADVANATAGES. BY LEADING A COALITION GOVERNMENT, THE DEMOCRATS GAIN ACCESS TO POWER AND RESOURCES TO BRING FURTHER POLIITICAL CHANGE IN THAILAND. MOREOVER, THEY CAN USE THIS POWER THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR TO HELP THEM DEVELOP THEIR ORGANIZATION AND CREDIBILITY IN RURAL AREAS. BY KEEPING THE REMAKES OF TWO OR THREE OF THE FORMER UTPP PARTIES OUT OF POWER, THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR FURTHER DEMISE, OR FORCE THEM TO PURGE THEMSELVES AND BECOME A DIFFERENT TYPE OF CONSERVAATIVE FORCE. FINALLY, IF THE DEMOCRATS CAN'T OR WON'T TAKE POWER NOW,
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THEY COULD LOSE SUPPORT AND THE MOMENTUM GENERATED TOWARD MORE RESPONSIVE AND REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND.

DISADVANTAGES: THE DEMOCRATS EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO ATTACKS ON THEIR COMPETENCE IN THE FUTURE IF THEY FAIL TO SHOW PROGRESS ON THAILAND'S PROBLEMS NOW. PROGRESS WILL BE A NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TASK FOR ANY GOVERNMENT. IF THE LAW AND ORDER PROBLEM FURTHER DETERIORATES, OR THE

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DOMESTIC ECONOMY BECOMES GREATLY TROUBLED, THE FEELING
THAT PERHAPS THE CONSERVATIVE, MILITARY-BACKED PARTIES
ARE BETTER RULERS CULD LEAD TO A DEMOCRAT DEFEAT IN
THE NEXT ELECTION.

B. THAI NATION

ADVANATES: BY JOINING A DEMOCRAT-LED GOVERNMENT, THAI
NATION CUOLD SERVE AS A FORCE FOR MODERATION OF THE RATE
OF CHANGE THE DEMOCRATS ARE LIKELY TO TRY TO ENGINEER.
THAI NATION WOULD KEEP THE CENTRISTS FROM OCCUPYING ALL
THE HIGH GROUND. IT COULD ALSO SERVE AS A SOURCE OF
INFORMATION FOR CONSERVATIVE LEADERS ON INTENTIONS OF THE
MORE LIBERAL ELEMENTS IN THE GOVERNMENT. IT WOULD HAVE
INCREASED LEVERAGE ON THE REORGANIZATION OF
CONSERVATIVE GROUPS WHO REMAIN OUTSIDE THE GOVERNMENT IN
AN OPPOSITION ROLE, WHILE RETAINING ACCESS TO RESOURCES
AND POWER THAT WILL HELP IT PREPARE FOR THE NEXT ELECTION.
FINALLY, THROUGH THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO, THAI NATION COULD
DEVELOP A BACKING AMONG THE MILITARY. THAI NATION COULD
OBTAIN ALL THE ADVANTAGES ABOVE WITHOUT NECESSARILY HARMING
ITS CHANCES FOR THE FUTURE.

DISADVANTAGEES: IN ANY COALITION WITH THE CONSERVATIVES,
THAI NATION WOULD BE LIKELY TO SECURE THE PRIME MINISTER-
SHIP. THIS IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY TO BE THE CASE WITH THE DEMOCRATS.
THAI NATION RUNS THE RISK THAT THE OTHER REMAKES OF
THE UTPP PARTIES MIGHT REFUSE ITS LEADERHIP OR ASSISTANCE
BECAUSE IT "SOLD OUT" TO THE ENEMY, AND WILL INSTEAD TRY
TO ISOLATE THAI NATION FROM ANY REORGANIZED CONSERVATIVE
FORCE.

C. SOCIAL AGRARIAN PARTY
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PAGE 04 BANGKO 01739 01 OF 02 301439Z

ADVANTAGES: BY JOINING THE DEMOCRATS ALONG WITH
THAI NATION, THE SOCIAL AGRARIANS WOULD HAVE A ROLE IN
THE GOVERNMENT THAT THEY WOULD NOT ENJOY AMONG THE
OPPOSITION. THEY WOULD ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE ASSOCIATION
SINCE THEY HAVE FEWER UTPP MEMBERS THAN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE
AND SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTIES, AND WOULD FURTHER SPLIT
THEIR IMAGE FROM THE OLD GUARD. ALTERNATIVELY, THEY COULD
BEGIN THE REBUILDING OF CONSERVATIVE STRENGTH, AND
PREPARE THEIR WAY INTO A NEW PARTY FORMED AROUND THAI
NATION AND OTHER CONSERVATIVES IN A FUTURE ELECTION.

DISADVANTAGES: THE OLD LINERS IN THE
SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTIES WILL RESENT THE
SOCIAL AGRARIAN SELL OUT. IF THE DEMOCRATS DO NOT

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Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006

PROSPER, THEIR FAILURE WOKFD RUB OFF ON THE SOCIAL
AGRARIANS IN THE NEXT ELECTION.

D. THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY

ADVANTAGES: SOCIAL ACTION WOULD OBTAIN ACCESS TO RESOURCES
AND POWER (MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND POSSIBLY COMMERCE)
THAT CAN HELP IT FURTHER DEVELOP ITS ORGANIZATION AND
ALLIES FOR THE NEXT ELECTION. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THESE
MINISTRIES WILL OFFER IT AN OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN
APPLYING ITS WELL-DEFINED ECONOMIC POLICIES TO SOME OF
THAILAND'S DEVELOPMENT PROBLEMS. MEMBERS OF THE PARTY,
AS "MODERN CONSERATIVIES", WOULD ALSO KEEP UP THEIR
MOMENTUM AGAINST "OLD STYLE" CONSERVATIVES.

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 01739 02 OF 02 301332Z

46
ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-03

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BANGKOK 1739

DISADVANTAGES: ESPECIALLY SINCE IT IS UNLIKELY TO GET
EVERYTHING ITS OWN WAY, SOCIAL ACTION RUNS THE RISK OF
HAVING ITS ECONOMIC POLICIES FAIL AND BE TURNED AGAINST
IT THE NEXT TIME AROUND. IT ALSO HAS TO TAKE THE CHANCE
THAT SOME OF ITS MEMBERS MIGHT FORM ALLIANCES WITH OTHER
INDIVIDUALS IN THE COALITION, AND EVENTUALLY LEAVE THE
PARTY TO LINK WITH MORE NATURAL ALLIES EITHER IN THE THAI
NATION OR NEW FORCE PARTIES.

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E. THE NEW FORCE PARTY

ADVANTAGES : NEW FORCE HAS LITTLE TO GAIN OTHER THAN
A POSSIBLE MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIO, AND AIDING THE DEMOCRATS
IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE ATROPHYING OF THE OLD REGIME FORCES.

DISADVANTAGES: THE MOST SERIOUS DISADVANTAGE FOR THE
NEW FORCE IS HAVING TO LIVE WITH ITSELF FOR COMPROMISING
WITH PEOPLE IT HAS SO LONG CRITICIZED AND ACCUSED OF BEING
PART OF THE OLD GUARD. THIS IS A SERIOUS PROBLEM FOR IT, AND
COULD BE ENOUGH TO KEEP IT OUT OF THE FORMAL COALITION
WHILE STILL HELPING THE DEMOCRATS ON CERTAIN PARTLIAMENTARY
VOTES.
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F. NON-PARTICIPATING UTPP REMNANTS

ADVANTAGES: IN AN OPPOSITION ROLE, THE SOCIAL JUSTICE AND
SOCIAL NATIONALIST PARTIES (AS WELL AS SOCIAL AGRARIAN
IF IT CHOOSES NOT TO JOIN THE CENTRIST COALITION), COULD
TURN THEIR TIME OUT OF POWER TO THEIR FUTURE ADVANTAGE.

FIRST, THEY COULD CONCENTRATE ON REGROUPING, REORGANIZAING,
RECRUITING, AND REINANCING FOR THE NEXT ELECTION,
PROBABLY UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF DR. NIPHON SASITHON,
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE PARTY. SECOND,
THE PURGE OF THE OLD LEADERS AMONG THEM AND THE REBUILDING
OF THEIR FORCE AND CREDIBILITY WILL BE EASIER IF THEY ARE
OUT OF POWER AND HAVE NO PREBENDS TO DISPENCSE. AS
THEY NOW STAND, THE UTPP FORCES ARE FACTIONALIZED AND TOO
WEAK TO RUN FOR ELECTION IN THE NEAR FUTURE. THIRD, IF THEY TAKE
A LOWER PROFILE SOME OF THE
FEAR AND HATRED OF THE OLD FORCES SHOULD LESSEN BY THE
NEXT ELECTION -- ESPECIALLY IF THE DEMOCRATS CAN'T SHOW
PROGRESS ON THE NATION'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS.
FOURTH, EVEN WHIL OUT OF POWER, THEY COULD "COVERTLY"
COOPERATE WITH THE THAI NATION PARTY WHILE IT IS PART OF
THE COALITION GOVERNMENT AND THEREBY RETAIN CONTROL OVER
SOME RESOURCES WHILE LOBBYING FOR OTHERS.

DISADVANTAGES: THE MAIN DISADVANTAGE FOR THESE PARTIES
LIN THE OPPOSITION IS THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE RUNNING THE
GOVERNMENT, AND THEREFORE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO CONTROL SO
MANY SOURCES OF FINANCING WHICH HAVE BEEN SO READILY
AVAILABLE TO THEM IN THE PAST. THEY WOULD HAVE TO TRY
TO REBUILD WITH REDUCED RESOURCES.

4. CONCLUSION

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A CENTRIST COALTION CURRNTLY APPEARS TO BE THE MOST LIKELY POSSIBILITY FOR FORMING A GOVERNMENT. THE FORE-GOING ANALYSIS INCLUDES SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT PARTY LEADERS ARE TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION IN ARRIVING AT A DECISION WHETHER TO JOIN IN.
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PAGE 03 BANGKO 01739 02 OF 02 301332Z

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